

Connecting Coach to Business Need

How Organizations Organize and Assign Coaches for Impact



Evan Leybourn & Samantha Laing



BUSINESS AGILITY
INSTITUTE

A Business Agility Institute Research Report

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research is only possible through the gift of time and knowledge from the individuals and organizations who take part. Our gratitude goes to them for sharing their experiences and insights with us.

Special thanks to Ableton, Airbus, Bank of Singapore, BNP Paribas, Boeing, Citizens Property Insurance Corporation, Greenway Health, JPMorgan Chase, Nationwide, Pacific Life, Spark NZ, Westpac, Xero as well as the 11 organizations who requested to remain anonymous.

All data collected through interviews was anonymized, securely stored, and made accessible only to those on the research team. Names of individuals, companies, and other potential identifiers have been removed or anonymized.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	4
HOW COACHES ARE ORGANIZED	5
Assigned Directly to Teams	5
Assigned Directly to Business Units	6
Assigned to a Common Pool	6
COACHING ROLES	7
Embedded Team Coach	8
Agile Coach	9
Enterprise Coach	10
ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS	12
THE IMPACT OF COACHING	15
Reported Benefits	15
Challenges Along the Journey	16
Coaching Agreements	17
RESEARCH CONTEXT & METHODS	18
WHO IS THE BUSINESS AGILITY INSTITUTE	19



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Unpredictable markets, demanding customers, and untapped employees are driving organizations towards greater business agility. Whether through business transformation, agile transformation, digital transformation, or ongoing capability improvement, organizations are engaging highly skilled individuals to embed new behaviors, capabilities, ways of working across the organization – broadly referred to as coaches.

Based on our analysis of the interviewed organizations, we have identified 3 distinct approaches for structuring coaching groups, with significant variation based on the roles of coaches within the organization. These approaches govern where the coaches operate and the amount of time dedicated to a given team or business unit. These are **Team**, **Business Unit (BU)**, and **Common Pool**.

Summary of coaching roles and defining characteristics

Coaching Roles	Embedded Team Coach	Agile Coach	Enterprise Coach
	Responsible for agile events and ways of working within a small number of teams.	Responsible for embedding new ways of working, and the associated cultural and behavioral changes.	Responsible for transformational activities, coaching leaders or executives, or coaching specialized areas.
Also Known As	Scrum Master, Team Facilitator, Delivery Coach	Product Coach, Systems Coach, Ways of Working Coach	Senior Agile Coach, Leadership Coach, Business Coach
% of organizations using this type of coach	96%	92%	42%
Mostly assigned to	Teams	Business Units	Business Units or Transformational Activities
Coaching Ratio (global average)	1 coach per 2.2 teams	3.1 coaches per BU	1.3 coaches per BU
Ideal Ratio (global average)	66% of organizations are 10-20% short of their ideal coach ratio	69% of organizations are 30-80% short of their ideal coach ratio	83% of organizations need up to 2x more Enterprise Coaches
Assignment Duration	Usually permanent	9 months on average	As needed
Who Makes Assignment Decisions	100% by management	58% by management 42% self-determined	40% by management 20% self-determined



INTRODUCTION

Unpredictable markets, demanding customers, and untapped employees are driving organizations towards greater business agility. Whether through business transformation, agile transformation, digital transformation, or ongoing capability improvement, organizations are engaging highly skilled individuals to embed new behaviors, capabilities, ways of working across the organization – broadly referred to as coaches.

There are a broad range of expectations and responsibilities for coaches across different organizations. For example, an Agile Coach might work with a product organization to embed agile values and ways of working. A DevOps Coach might work with a development team to embed new technical practices. An Enterprise Coach might work with a HR function to help them transform their performance management processes. And a Scrum Master might work with an executive leadership team to help improve the effectiveness of their collaboration.

Regardless of what they are called or where they work, coaches help organizations, teams, and individuals attain the desired outcomes from their transformation activity.

This study seeks to understand how organizations align the right coaching capability to business needs and the different approaches that they use to organize their coaches.

In undertaking this research, the Business Agility Institute has interviewed the Head of Coaching, Head of Transformation, or equivalent role from 24 organizations, collectively responsible for nearly 1,000 coaches.

Interviewed organizations represent companies ranging from 1,000 to 300,000 people in Europe, the USA, and Asia-Pacific. The majority of the companies interviewed were from the Technology or the Financial Services sector; however telecommunications, health care and aerospace companies also participated.

Based on our analysis of the interviews, we have identified 3 distinct approaches that organizations take in organizing coaching groups, with significant variation based on the roles of coaches within the organization. These approaches govern where the coaches operate and the amount of time dedicated to a given team or business unit.

This report details each of these approaches, when they are used, their benefits and challenges, as well as other common factors that emerged in the research; such as development goals, employment status, and coaching success measures.



HOW COACHES ARE ORGANIZED

While there are some similarities, organizations had different approaches to structuring their coaching groups based on where they wanted coaches to focus. The 3 approaches to **Coach Assignment** govern the focus of coaches, where they operate, and the amount of time dedicated within a given team or business unit. These are **Team**, **Business Unit (BU)**, and **Common Pool**.

Summary of how and where different coaches are assigned

Approaches to Coach Assignment	Embedded Team Coach	Agile Coach	Enterprise Coach ¹
Assigned to Teams	Always (100%)	Sometimes (13%)	Never
Assigned to Business Units	Never	Usually (67%)	Sometimes (40%)
Assigned to a Common Pool	Never	Sometimes (21%)	Sometimes (20%)

Regardless of which assignment approach was used, coaches could still move between business units or teams after their coaching objectives were met or if new priorities emerged. Only 38% of organizations assigned coaches to teams or business units permanently – replacing them with a new coach if the individual resigned or moved on.

Assigned Directly to Teams

Coaches are dedicated to a small set of teams (between 1-5 teams) and moved once the coaching agreement is complete (or by exception). Done well, coaches create trusted partnerships with team members. 33% of organizations had a significant portion of their Agile Coach and Embedded Team Coach capability dedicated to teams.

Observations of Note: In the interviewed companies, Embedded Team Coaches are always fully dedicated to teams while Enterprise Coaches never are.

Why to use this Approach: While this approach requires more coaches per team or business unit, organizations see rapid improvement at the team level when coaches are assigned directly. This approach also has lower management overhead as there is minimal logistical effort involved in tracking and reassigning coaches.

¹ 40% of Enterprise Coaches in interviewed companies were never assignable to teams or business units - these coaches were usually responsible for transformational activities.



Assigned Directly to Business Units

Different organizations used different terms to refer to their high-level organizational areas; business unit, tribe, division, product line, portfolio, line of business, etc – ranging anywhere from 5 teams to over 100. For the purpose of this report, we will refer to these as Business Units.

Under this approach, coaches are dedicated to a business unit (between 1-5 coaches per business unit) and can then be assigned to teams within that area as needed. Done well, coaches create effective personal relationships with business unit leaders. 75% of the interviewed organizations had a significant portion of their Agile and Enterprise Coaching capability dedicated to business units.

Observations of Note: Despite being dedicated to the business unit, in 71% of organizations the Agile Center of Excellence (CoE) or Transformation Office still paid the salaries or rates of the agile coaches. Further detail on funding accountabilities can be found under the Organizational Characteristics section of this report.

Why to use this Approach: Organizations can tailor the level of engagement between coaches and specific teams depending on need. However it has a greater reliance on creating and maintaining effective personal relationships between coaches and BU leadership. This approach also has moderate management overhead in tracking and reassigning coaches – however that overhead is shared between the business unit and the Agile CoE or Transformation Office (if appropriate).

Assigned to a Common Pool

Coaches are assigned to a central pool from which teams and business units draw on according to their needs. As coaching objectives are met, or superseded by changing business demands, coaches are released back into the pool and reassigned as needed. Done well, coaches move between different areas and gain a broad understanding of the organization as a whole. 29% of organizations had some or all of their Agile and Enterprise Coaches assigned to a common pool.

Observations of Note: In some cases, organizations had both BU Assignment and Common Pool Assignment. Larger (or strategic) business units were directly allocated coaches, while a pool of coaches was centralized to support the rest of the organization.

Why to use this Approach: As long as there is available coaching capacity (or a coach can be reassigned), organizations are able to assign coaches to areas of greatest need. Teams or business units requiring specialized coaching usually receive it sooner as there are fewer restrictions to where coaches can add value.



COACHING ROLES

When describing their coaching groups, it is important to understand that there is no standard definition of the responsibilities of an agile coach. As part of the interview with each organization, we documented how each defined the role and, where they had multiple roles, the distinction between them.

While there were many different definitions, for this report we have consolidated them into three specific categories of coach. **Embedded Team Coaches**, **Agile Coaches**, and **Enterprise Coaches**. From this, we analyzed how organizations engaged these coaches, the kind of work they were asked to do, the ratios of teams and business units to coaches, and how coaches were organized.

Expanded summary of coaching roles and defining characteristics

Coaching Roles	Embedded Team Coach	Agile Coach	Enterprise Coach
	Responsible for agile events and ways of working within a small number of teams.	Responsible for embedding new ways of working, and the associated cultural and behavioral changes.	Responsible for transformational activities, coaching leaders or executives, or coaching specialized areas.
Also Known As	Scrum Master ² , Team Facilitator, Delivery Coach	Product Coach, Systems Coach, Ways of Working Coach	Senior Agile Coach, Leadership Coach, Business Coach
% of organizations³	96% ⁴	92%	42%
Mostly assigned to	Teams	Business Units	Business Units or Transformational Activities
Coaching Ratio (global average)	1 coach per 2.2 teams	3.1 coaches per BU	1.3 coaches per BU
Ideal Ratio (global average)	66% of organizations are 10-20% short of their ideal coach ratio	69% of organizations are 30-80% short of their ideal coach ratio	83% of organizations need up to 2x more Enterprise Coaches
Assignment Duration	Usually permanent	9 months on average	As needed
Who Makes Assignment Decisions	100% by management	58% by management 42% self-determined	40% by management 20% self-determined

² Not all organizations class scrum masters as a coaching role. However enough did that we have classed them in the report.

³ Percentages may add up to more than 100% as many organizations have multiple coach roles simultaneously.

⁴ During the initial interviews, only 21% of organizations referred to their scrum masters as a coaching role. Follow-up questions confirmed that almost every organization had team facilitators, scrum masters, or similar roles embedded within their technology teams at a minimum.



Embedded Team Coach

This role incorporates anyone who facilitates or guides agile events and ways of working within a small number of teams. In hierarchical organizations, the embedded team coach sometimes reported directly to the agile coach.

Also Known As: Sometimes described as a team facilitator, delivery coach, scrum leader, or scrum master. While not all organizations classed scrum masters as a coaching role, enough did that we have included them in the analysis.

% of Organizations: 96% of interviewed organizations reported having Embedded Team Coaches or referred to their scrum masters as coaches. However, only 21% of organizations had their scrum masters (or similar team facilitation roles) reporting into the same group as their agile coaches. In the majority of organizations, scrum masters reported directly to a delivery manager within the product group.

Reported Team to Coach Ratio: In most organizations, each Embedded Team Coach supported between 2 (1:2) and 3 (1:3) teams. With a global average of 1 coach per 2.2 teams.

Ideal Team to Coach Ratio: 66% of respondents reported that they were understaffed with Embedded Team Coaches. In most cases, organizations are between 10-20% short and actively recruiting at the moment.

Assignment Approaches: Embedded Team Coaches were only ever assigned directly to teams – in part because of the nature of the work, but also due to the low team-to-coach ratio needed. They were never (0%) assigned to business units or given the flexibility to move between a larger number of teams (Common Pool Assignment).

Assignment Duration: While coaches could theoretically be reallocated to new teams, most organizations treated Embedded Team Coaches as permanently assigned to that team.

Who Makes Assignment Decisions: In all interviewed companies, Embedded Team Coaches were always assigned by management to specific teams (i.e. they had no direct autonomy over which teams they were responsible for).

Enterprise Coaching: By the nature of the work, in the interviewed companies Embedded Team Coaches were never assigned to Enterprise Coaching activities.



Agile Coach

This role incorporates anyone responsible for embedding new ways of working, and the associated cultural and behavioral changes, across multiple teams or business units.

Also Known As: Sometimes described as a product coach, technology coach, systems coach, or ways of working coach.

% of Organizations: Agile Coaches were the most common coaching role across all interviewed companies – 92% of organizations in total.

Reported BU to Coach Ratio: In most organizations, between 0.5 (1:2) and 10 (10:1) Agile Coaches support each business unit. The global average was 3.1 coaches per business unit.

Amongst the interviewed companies, there were a couple of extreme outliers (e.g. 1 coach per 100+ teams or 5+ business units). In these cases, despite being called agile coaches, their responsibilities were primarily to conduct training.

Ideal BU to Coach Ratio: 69% of respondents reported that they have a shortage of qualified Agile Coaches to meet the demand across the organization, on average between 30-80% short. In most cases, lack of available budget is identified as the driving challenge.

Assignment Approaches:

1. *Team Assignment:* It was rare for Agile Coaches to be directly assigned to Teams - only 13% of organizations reported this. In these organizations, Scrum Masters were not seen as a coaching role and Agile Coaches were responsible for bridging the gap between the execution of agile practices and transformational goals.
2. *BU Assignment:* This was the most common assignment method for Agile Coaches - adopted by 67% of organizations. Within the business unit, they move around and support various teams as well as directly help the BU leadership. This allows for deep relationships and contextual understanding to be formed.
3. *Common Pool Assignment:* 21% of organizations adopted Common Pool Assignment for their Agile Coaches. In general, these organizations have fewer coaches per business unit than those assigned to business units (1.8 per BU compared to 2.7 per BU).

Assignment Duration: On average, coaches worked with teams for 9 months before moving on to new teams.

Who Makes Assignment Decisions: How coaches were assigned to their work followed two different paths. In some cases, the coaches themselves determined coaching assignments amongst themselves. In other cases, management determined the coaching assignments.

While slightly below average, Agile Coaches in 42% of organizations had the autonomy to manage their own assignments. This isn't laissez-faire – coaches are still expected to work together to triage and respond to requests, work directly with business leaders to understand business needs, and plan between them where they will go. Assignments are regularly revised as organizational needs change. Coaches making their own assignment decisions were 40% more likely to be part of a pool than dedicated to a business unit.



The most common assignment approach, for 58% for organizations, Agile Coaches are assigned by management to support specific business units or teams. This also includes scenarios where coaches are directly recruited (and funded) into a specific business unit. In general, Agile Coaches do not move from this business unit or team unless further directed.

Regardless of who is making the decision, in all cases the head of the Agile CoE or Transformation Office may intervene if there is an overcommitment from the coaches or a mismatch of experience.

Enterprise Coaching: With a small number of exceptions, Agile Coaches rarely overlapped with the responsibilities of Enterprise Coaches. However, in these few exceptional cases, organizations used their Agile Coaches to supplement their Enterprise Coaches; **Coaching to Executives & Leaders** (4%), or to help **Coach Complex Teams or Niche Areas** (8%).

Enterprise Coach

This category had the most divergence in definition; some organizations defined an enterprise coach as an agile coach with more years of experience and others defined a coach with an entirely different set of skills. However, when looking at how they worked across an organization, these types of coaches operated very similarly to each other.

Also Known As: Sometimes described as a senior coach, business coach, or leadership coach.

% of Organizations: Enterprise Coaches were recruited by 42% of interviewed organizations to support their transformation agenda. 33% of organizations with Enterprise Coaches also had Agile Coaches.

Reported BU to Coach Ratio: For the most part, organizations did not assign Enterprise Coaches directly to business units. These were usually funded and assigned to the Agile Center of Excellence (CoE) or Transformation Office. However, for those business units that did have dedicated Enterprise Coaches, there were between 1 (1:1) and 5 (5:1) Enterprise Coaches per BU (fewer than Agile Coaches). The global average was 1.3 coaches per business unit.

Ideal BU to Coach Ratio: In almost every case (83%), organizations report needing additional Enterprise Coaches. In some cases, more than twice as many. A lack of talent in the market is reported as one of the biggest impediments to hiring more Enterprise Coaches (rather than a lack of funds as is the case for Agile Coaches).

Assignment Approaches: While 40% of Enterprise Coaches remain unassigned, 40% of Enterprise Coaches were assigned to business units, while 20% were free to support any part of the organization (Common Pool Assignment). Either way, several organizations described their Enterprise Coaches as an Internal Consultancy – some of these going as far as creating internal chargebacks for coaching time.



Assignment Duration: Most enterprise coaches were not assigned to teams or business units. Those that were generally stayed long enough to resolve a specific issue before moving on to other areas of the organization.

Who Makes Assignment Decisions: Unlike Agile Coaches, for Enterprise Coaches, who makes the assignment decision directly correlates to where coaches are assigned. 40% of Enterprise Coaches are assigned by managers directly to business units. While the 20% of Enterprise Coaches assigned to the common pool generally make their own assignment decisions.

Enterprise Coaching: Enterprise Coaches were responsible for a broader set of activities (regardless of whether they are using BU Assignment, Common Pool Assignment, or are not assigned at all). In general, Enterprise Coaches are either assigned to **Support the Transformation**, to provide 1 on 1 **Coaching to Executives & Leaders**, or to **Coach Complex Teams or Niche Areas**.

- **Supporting the Transformation:** Transformation-oriented coaches are more likely to be assigned to support the transformation (either across the organization or within a BU) than anything else. 50% of all Enterprise Coaches (across all assignment approaches) are assigned to support the transformation. This equates to 21% of organizations. Their responsibilities include running workshops with executives, designing new or improved business processes, or providing logistical and governance support to the transformation itself. Other organizations either do not have a transformation program, or responsibility for the transformation sits outside the coaching group.
- **Coaching to Executives & Leaders:** Rather than being assigned to teams or business units, Enterprise Coaches are assigned to coach business executives and leaders either 1:1 or as an executive team. 40% of Enterprise Coaches were assigned to coach executives or leaders rather than teams.
- **Coaching Complex Teams or Niche Areas:** In many cases, enterprise coaches are seen to have a level of expertise in coaching beyond a regular agile coach. As such, 10% of all Enterprise Coaches are assigned to teams that require specialized coaching. This equates to 13% of organizations. In business agility transformations, enterprise coaches are often assigned where coaching is required in non-technology and business teams (such as finance or HR).



ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

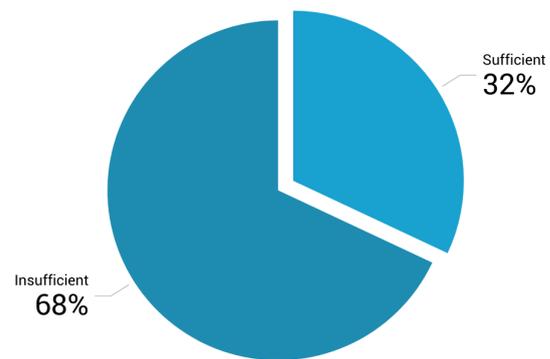
Multiple factors were examined and shown to have little impact on the overall coaching approaches used in the organization. For example, employment type (full-time staff or contractor), responsibilities of the Agile Center of Excellence (CoE) or Transformation Office, funding responsibilities, company size, company age, company industry, or company region.

While not directly related to how organizations assign coaches, there were several other characteristics of note.

Coaching Supply and Demand

68% of organizations report that they don't have enough coaches to support demand across the organization. While a few organizations report difficulty in finding good talent in the market, most organizations report internal budget constraints as the most immediate challenge.

This lack of coaching capability has a wide range of consequences for organizations. Ranging from lowest to highest impact, these include.



- Misalignment between the needs of the coachee and the skills of the coach (and no alternative coaches to support them)
- Shorter duration coaching assignments (often ending before a lasting impact can be achieved)
- Ineffective or superficial coaching for assigned teams and business units
- Additional wasted time in attending meetings with limited value
- Limited to high-level activities, such as training, rather than direct coaching
- Burnout for coaches and higher attrition rates for companies

Organizations report needing anywhere from 10-200% more coaches to support current demand.

Coaching Hierarchy

In most organizations, the coaching roles and responsibilities do not equate to a functional hierarchy; in other words, regardless of role or skill, all coaches report to a single coaching manager. Only a small number of organizations (17%) have Embedded Team Coaches directly reporting to Agile Coaches and/or Agile Coaches reporting to Enterprise Coaches.

Somewhat related, many organizations report investing heavily in internal skills development to create new agile coaches. In these organizations, the most common career path for a Scrum Master or Embedded Team Coach is to become an Agile Coach.

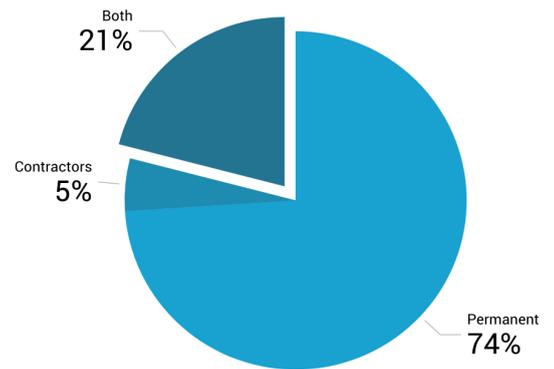


Employment Type

In almost every organization (74%), coaches were internal, full-time, staff. In some cases, the coaches were legally independent contractors, but they filled a full-time position within the company. Only 5% of organizations solely engaged temporary contractors as coaches.

The remaining 21% of organizations used a combination of both; with the contractors mostly hired to develop internal capability. Once the internal capability reached an acceptable level, the contractors were released.

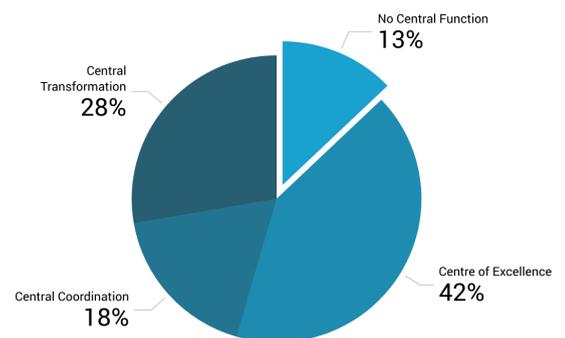
One additional observation was that many organizations had reached the point where coaching was a formal career path within the HR systems of the organization. This seems to be a key milestone in the maturity of organizations in their agile adoption – with a lot of work going into HR planning, career paths, progression maps, etc. Those earlier in the journey were generally tagging coaches to non-coaching codes within the HR systems.



Agile Centers of Excellence & Transformation Offices

The majority of organizations (88%) have a central agile group that is accountable for the coaches. Amongst other things, this function is generally responsible for the recruitment, professional development, and management of coaches. In our interviews, we identified three different types of central agile groups.

- Center of Excellence (CoE):** The most common type of central group (42%) is a center of excellence; sometimes also known as the agile center of excellence, center of competence, office of enterprise business agility, etc. This group is responsible for creating and communicating professional standards for the coaches as well as common agile practices and processes for the business units.
- Transformation Office:** For organizations that are running a formal agile or business agility transformation, the transformation office is accountable for running it (28%). In these organizations, coaches are usually responsible for transformation activities in teams or business units under the guidance of the transformation office.
- Coordination Group:** A small number of organizations (18%) have a centralized coordination group that has direct accountability and management of the coaches and, usually, their assignments. However, unlike the CoE, the coordination group is not responsible for agile practices in the broader organization.



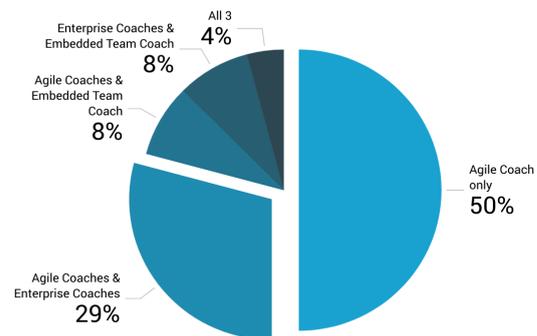
In the majority of cases (71%), the central agile group was funded to recruit the coaches; regardless of how they would be dedicated to business units or teams. In organizations where coaches were directly recruited by business units (29%), most still had either a coordination group or agile center of excellence - however, never a transformation office.



Coaching Combinations

Between Embedded Team Coaches, Agile Coaches, and Enterprise Coaches, 50% of interviewed organizations had multiple roles simultaneously.

Most common was the combination of Agile Coaches and Enterprise Coaches (29%). Having both roles enabled the organizations to split responsibilities between coaching teams/business units and transformational activities. Only a few organizations had different combinations of coaching roles.



For organizations with only a single coaching role (50%), the only role they defined was an Agile Coach. No organization had Embedded Team Coaches or Enterprise Coaches without also having Agile Coaches.

Professional Development

Almost every interviewed organization encouraged ongoing professional development and knowledge sharing within their coaches. However, usually only organizations with significant numbers of coaches had developed an internal learning curriculum. In these cases, the learning curriculum was for permanent coaches only. Contractors were mostly expected to invest in upskilling themselves.

The most common curriculum was the career path to help Scrum Masters (whether classed as Embedded Team Coaches or not) to become agile coaches. Beyond this, the most common focus areas for coaches professional development were:

- Business leadership and leadership coaching (working with C-level stakeholders)
- Facilitation skills
- Health, wellbeing, and resilience topics
- Remote and virtual coaching and facilitation
- Focused techniques; e.g. team topologies, value stream coaching, bizdevops, liberating structures, or systems coaching
- Business agility and agile beyond technology

Coaches were encouraged to acquire professional certifications, however unless an organization was committed to a specific framework, the certification brand wasn't mandated.



THE IMPACT OF COACHING

Reported Benefits

Most organizations (89%) reported qualitative benefits from their investment in coaching. Overall, these organizations all reported being more resilient and better able to respond to change. And although there was a large variety in how specific benefits were measured, several consistent themes emerged during the interviews.

It should be noted that not all teams or business units received equal coaching. Most organizations (68%) reported having insufficient coaches to meet demand (see Coaching Supply and Demand section). The reported benefits only apply to those teams and business units receiving coaching.

By helping the **adoption of agile practices and methods**, coaches enabled...

- Improved delivery outcomes (time to market, product quality, cycle time, delivery predictability, and response time).
- Improved predictability of team commitments (improved planning).
- A simplified product base and reduction in technical debt.
- Improved customer satisfaction (customer NPS and CSAT survey scores).

By helping **embed agile values and mindsets**, coaches enabled...

- A positive shift in employee engagement and happiness survey results.
- Agile mindsets and practices to expand to all areas of the organization.
- The creation of a safe space to disagree and work through challenges.

By helping **bridge teams and business units**, coaches enabled...

- More business leaders getting on board with the transformation agenda.
- Improved communication between teams and business units across the organization.
- Greater alignment around common goals between business and product teams.
- A constant reminder of the agile and/or business agility strategy.

To measure the impact of their coaches, most organizations (68%) leveraged the business or delivery metrics already in place for their teams and business units. These included: time to market, cycle time, delivery predictability, customer NPS scores, as well as specific KPIs, OKRs, or delivery-based metrics for each area.

The assumption being that if these are getting better then coaching is helping.

Very few organizations had specific coaching measurements other than regularly asking for feedback from the coached area (e.g. 6-monthly surveys). A few had OKRs or KPIs assigned to the coaches, but most of these were tied into team/business unit performance, coaching logistics (e.g. number of people coached or trained), or the coach pursuing identified learning and upskilling. If there was a Center of Excellence (CoE) in charge of the coaches, they usually had a few CoE specific OKRs as well.



Challenges Along the Journey

While every organization described their investment in coaching as valuable, it was not without its challenges. Like with the reported benefits, several consistent themes emerged in how organizations described the challenges they were facing.

Commitment and Buy-In: One of the most common challenges facing coaches was achieving the right level of commitment and buy-in from the teams and business units they were assigned to coach. Teams often faced significant delivery pressure and, ironically, had limited capacity to invest in improving their ways of working. Beyond that, the teams themselves were not always bought into the need for agility (or coaching).

Lack of Available Talent: In many organizations,⁵ coaching outcomes are constrained by the limited number of coaches available. This lack of coaches means that teams and business units do not receive the support and attention they need to achieve their objectives. Despite identifying this challenge, organizations often have ongoing funding constraints or hiring limitations preventing them from recruiting the coaches they need.

Compounding this challenge, those organizations with available funding are having difficulty in finding enough coaches with the right skills in the market to meet organizational needs.

Insufficient Time Allocated: As a consequence of the lack of available talent, many organizations reported that coaches were being reassigned too early. This left teams with ongoing, and unmet, coaching needs. Which, in turn, had a negative impact on organizations with inconsistent or unstructured improvements across their teams.

Balancing Coaching Skill and Business Need: Even in organizations with sufficient coaches, balancing the skills of the available coaches with the needs of the business is a challenge. Specialized coaches may not have the skills needed to fully support a business unit and vice versa (for example, a business unit might need technical coaching which the assigned coach can't deliver). As a consequence, some coaches report being overloaded while others in the same organizations struggle to find work.

Us vs Them (Coach vs CoE/Transformation Office): When coaches are embedded in a business unit for too long, or the CoE is overly prescriptive, a mentality of "us vs them" can emerge. Once this happens, alignment between coaches is more difficult or, inversely, coaches do not build deep bonds and interpersonal networks within business units.

Over Reliance on Coaching: Business units can become too dependent on the coach so, if they are reassigned, some of the practices that the coach organized (e.g. QBRs and continuous improvement activities) fall by the wayside.

⁵ See the Coaching Supply and Demand section above



Coaching Agreements

Most organizations created (or had coaches create) a coaching agreement with the team/business unit they were assigned to.

This was often described as similar to an internal consultancy model. Coaches would meet with the people in the assigned area and listen to their problems and objectives to design the coaching agreement. This agreement is regularly reviewed and updated as needed. The agreement also forms part of the success measures for the coach – for some, including the goals when coaching is considered “done” and the coach can move on to another team/business unit.

Common goals that were seen in coaching agreements include:

- Delivery Goals
 - Increase the predictability and/or sustainability of delivery
 - Increase the predictability of releases
 - Reduce defects
 - Reduce lead time
- Customer Goals
 - Instill a customer focus (usually through training or process improvement)
 - Improve customer satisfaction/NPS
- Employee Goals
 - Improve employee engagement and/or happiness (often in collaboration with HR)
 - Create an innovation culture across employees
 - Improve employee satisfaction/NPS
- Framework Goals
 - Upskill/train x% of the business unit

Coaching agreements usually define the planned interventions (which might include coaching, mentoring, training, facilitation, experiments, etc) as well as the expected outcomes and measures against the goals.



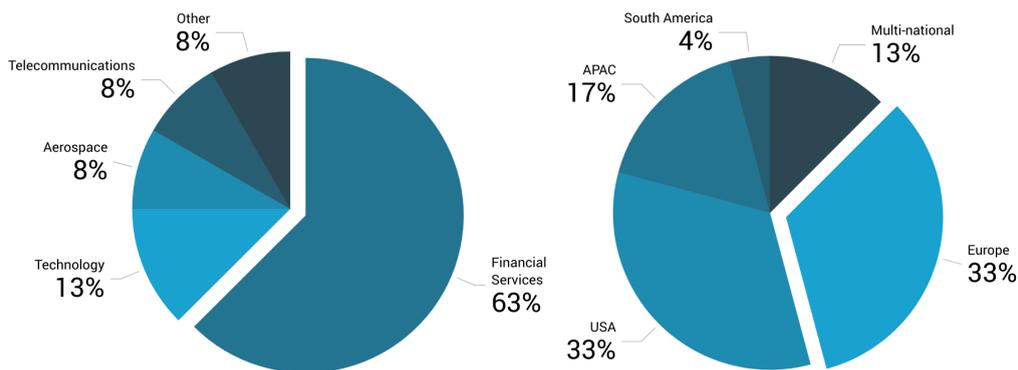
RESEARCH CONTEXT & METHODS

This study investigates the different models and approaches that organizations use to organize their coaching groups.

Approach: The report presents a consolidated analysis of the approach adopted by 24 large to extra-large companies to embed agile coaching in their structure and concentrate on coaches' roles and responsibilities, mission assignment, decision making and enterprise coaching responsibilities.

The report is based on a qualitative research method based on semi-structured interviews conducted with the head of coaching or transformation.

Participants: In undertaking this research, BAI has interviewed the Head of Coaching, Head of Transformation, or equivalent role from 24 organizations, collectively responsible for nearly 1,000 coaches. Interviewed organizations represent companies ranging from 1,000 to 300,000 people in Europe, the USA, and Asia-Pacific. The majority of the companies interviewed were from the Technology or the Financial Services sector; however telecommunications, health care and aerospace companies also participated.



To ensure anonymity, we cannot share any details or findings for participating companies.

Interviews: Interviewed companies were asked to describe:

- the roles & responsibilities of their coaches,
- ratios of coaches to teams and business units,
- how coaching groups were organized,
- how coaches were distributed across the organization,
- how assignment decisions were made, and
- the benefits and challenges in the way their coaching groups operated.

Outcomes: From these interviews, we identified 3 primary ways that organizations assign coaches and how these approaches vary based on the different coach roles. This report details each of these approaches, when they are used, their benefits and challenges, as well as other common factors that emerged in the research; such as development goals, employment status, and coaching success measures.



WHO IS THE BUSINESS AGILITY INSTITUTE

The Business Agility Institute® is a fiercely independent research & advocacy organization for the next generation of companies. We drive industry change through applied research, pragmatic guidance, and building networks of individuals and organizations. Our goal is your success *no matter what the future brings*.

To achieve this, we support organizations, teams, and individuals breaking away from traditional business models by providing the research and standards, advocacy & thought leadership, mentorship, and ecosystem development required to be bold and embrace a customer-driven world of fast-paced change.



Research and Standards:
Provide your organization with cutting-edge resources and opportunities to succeed on your business agility journey.



Advocacy & Thought Leadership
Curated, world-class repository of case studies, references, practical guides & research reports on business agility.



Mentorship:
Independent and unbiased guidance and advice about the journey ahead of you and the challenges you are facing.



Ecosystem Development:
Connect and build community with like-minded individuals to build your capabilities, breadth of knowledge, and friendships!

We are a team of researchers and storytellers. We investigate and tell the stories of businesses, organizations and teams who have survived floods of change by pursuing new approaches to business. Our research includes every aspect of organizations, including finance, marketing, sales, and support. Through this, we bring focus to the people in business. From individual contributors to leaders, managers, executives and boards of directors - each of us has a vital role to play in creating a resilient future world of work.

Become a member of the Business Agility Institute today!
<https://businessagility.institute/>



5500+
Members



75+
Countries



24
Major Events



490+
Publications



WITH THANKS TO OUR MEMBERS

